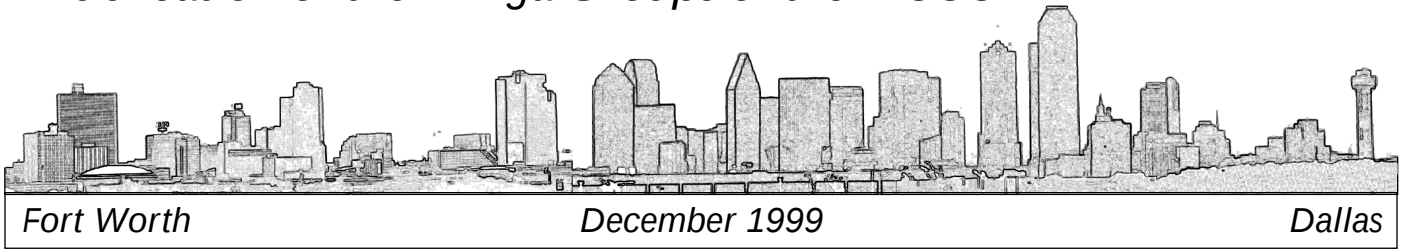


The AGM Connection

A Publication of the Amiga Groups of the MCCC



Editor's Comments

How about that 3.5...

You'd think there'd be a lot of news this month wouldn't you? Amiga OS 3.5 is out. Someone ought to be reviewing it. At least that's what I thought. What I've got instead is an empty newsletter. It seems that with all the bad news last month, no-one has anything to say this month.

Well, since there's no 3.5 review, I should probably give you my comments.

- It installs easily and without messing up your current settings too badly. Your user-startup and startup-sequence scripts are not overwritten. But... your custom datatypes are disabled (they seem to all work fine when you re-enable them).*
- The installation does not replace FastIPrefs. This gave me my only problem. If I had read the documentation, this wouldn't have been a problem at all. (Thanks, Johnny and Mark.) Just replace FastIPrefs with the new IPrefs program and everything works much better.*
- The Preferences programs are much improved. They are more modern in design and there are new options that didn't exist before. Other programs have been updated as well... the new IconEdit program is outstanding.*
- It's still necessary to run MCP in order to patch things that still need patching. Obviously there's more work to be done. And when is the window design going to be modified so that it looks correct and proportional when running on a 1 to 1 ratio screen?*
- The new Glow Icons are beautiful — at least on a high-color screen. I'm not sure how this all works on a standard Amiga screen — I haven't tried it — but it sure looks good on my computer. Of course, updating a system like mine to an all new icon set is close to a lifetime endeavor — at least it seems that way. And we don't have a workbench based tool yet to make the process easier like we did with the previous icon file formats.*

Is there room for improvement? You bet! Is it worth the upgrade price? You bet! After all these years, it's nice to have an update.

Railroads... and space Shuttles...

The US standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet 8.5 inches. That's a pretty odd number. Why was that gauge used?

Because that's the way they built them in England, and English expatriates built the US railroads.

Why did the English build them like that?

Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used.

Why did 'they' use that gauge then?

Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing.

Okay! Why did the wagons have that particular odd wheel spacing?

Well, if they tried to use any other spacing, the wagon wheels would break on some of the old, long distance roads in England, because that's the spacing of the wheel ruts.

So who built those old rutted roads?

The first long distance roads in Europe (and England) were built by Imperial Rome for their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts? Roman war chariots first made the initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagon wheels and wagons. Since the chariots were made for, or by Imperial Rome, they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

Thus, we have the answer to the original question. The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches

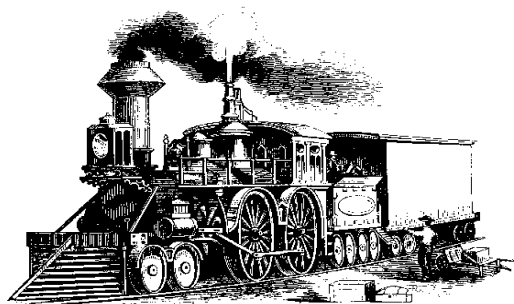
derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman war chariot.

Specifications and bureaucracies live forever. So, the next time you are handed a specification and wonder which horse's rear came up with it, you may be exactly right. Because the Imperial Roman war chariots were made just wide enough to accommodate the back ends of two war-horses.

And now, the twist to the story...

There's an interesting extension to the story about railroad gauges and horses 'behinds.' When we see a Space Shuttle sitting on its launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. Thiokol makes the SRBs at their factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs might have preferred to make

them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line from the factory had to run through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than the railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horses behinds. So, the major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined by the width of a Horse's rear.



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December Calendar

- Dec 14 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 pm — N.Richland Hills Community Ctr.
Loop 820 at Rufe Snow, N.Richland Hills
- Dec 14 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 10:00 pm — TGI Friday's
Loop 820 & Bedford Euless Road
- Dec 16 — Amiga North Dallas Chapter
7:30 pm — SMU Building
Collins Blvd. & International Pkwy, Richardson
- Dec 26 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

BBS # — (817) 280-9900

Membership Watch

Expired November, 1999



Expiring December, 1999

Steve Roark

Chris Scheers